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Farritor, student group help propel Maker Space concept



A quiet staging area for ongoing NIC construction, the space is reserved for a proposed Maker Space and the private/public research campus' new business accelerator. NIC planners and UNL administrators hope the mix bubbles forth into a cauldron of hands-on creativity and innovation.

"That is an area of Nebraska Innovation Campus that is generating a lot of excitement," said Dan Duncan, NIC's executive director. "The general idea is to create the Maker Space where individuals can come to work on projects and interact with others, including people who are in a business accelerator model.

"It has the potential to make a big impact."

The Maker Space idea grew from a proposal generated by NIC's faculty advisory committee. Shane Farritor, a professor of mechanical and materials engineering and member of the committee, is leading the Maker Space effort.

Farritor — who first built things as a child in his family's hardware store, and today crafts cutting-edge robots designed for tasks ranging from highway safety to remote surgery —

sees the Maker Space as a way to tap into a Nebraska's builder pipeline.

"Nebraska is full of makers," Farritor said. "There are so many talented kids who grow up in rural areas building and creating things. It's one of the things I respect most about the state. It is also the reason why I believe the Maker Space will be a success."

As proposed, the Maker Space would include specialized areas for laser and/or water jet cutters, a machine shop, wood working, metal working, textiles, electronics, plastics and welding.

The space would be open to the public, similar to a rec center where members pay for access. Members will have to complete training before earning access to the space.

Farritor said the concept is similar to maker spaces such as the TechShop in San Francisco and the Hobby Shop at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"When I was at MIT, it was more of a wood shop, but it was an amazing opportunity to be part of," Farritor said. "I know of two businesses that grew out of that shop when I was there." Furthermore, the NIC concept is innovative as it links the Maker Space with the business accelerator — which is designed to help entrepreneurs launch ideas and subsequent businesses.

"Just thinking about the potential in that mix is quite exciting," Farritor said. "And, that potential grows when you consider that these individuals will also be working near Nebraska Innovation Campus' industrial tenants."

NIC planners and university officials are working to identify funding for the proposed Maker Space. Planning continues to move forward, with the space tentatively opening later this year. The proposal has led to the creation of the UNL Maker Club, a student group that will hold a first meeting at 7 p.m. Feb. 5 in 318 Walter Scott Engineering Center. The meeting is open to anyone interested in the Maker Space proposal.

"We want a variety of disciplines involved with the Maker Space and this new group," Farritor said. "That mixed dynamic is important. It's an environment that leads to incredible things."

For more information on the Maker Space, contact Farritor at sfarritor@unl.edu

(<mailto:sfarritor@unl.edu>).

Article by Troy Fedderson, University Communications

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